

DT NOTES



A Conversation With Danica Paulos

BY HALEY HILTON

Training: Orange County Dance Center (Huntington Beach, CA); Yuri Grigoriev School of Ballet (Los Angeles, CA); The Ailey School (New York, NY)

Performance: Ailey II (2013–14), Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (2014–present)

When Danica Paulos left Southern California at 17 to train in New York City at The Ailey School while she finished high school, she had no idea that she'd be dancing with the professional company within four years. She completed the school's professional program (on scholarship), then landed a spot with Ailey II. After a year, she was invited to replace an injured dancer in the main company, and when her Ailey II season ended, Robert Battle invited her to continue full-time.

"I realize that not everyone has the opportunity to rise through the ranks as quickly as I was able to, because it's such a competitive company without a lot of turnover. I tried to absorb everything I experienced, because I knew it was going to be taken away from me in just a few months."

Paulos also plays a major role in the company's marketing strategy by managing the Instagram feed started four years ago by a group of AAADT dancers. It gives audiences a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the company. Follow @alvinailey on Instagram, and watch Paulos and her fellow dancers perform around the country this month.

On running AAADT's social-media account "I took one semester of beginning photography in high school, and, since then, I've spent a lot of time learning from the internet and practicing the skill. I've cultivated my personal talents in order to get deep into the things our followers want to see. I've used my excitement for life, my openness,

my capacity to make people feel comfortable in front of the camera, and the fact that I know the choreography and what will look best on our feed, to create something effective."

What drew her to AAADT "The movement. And then, of course, there's that feeling that's impossible to put into words. There was an energy that struck me when I first entered the Ailey building. Something opened my heart and lit a fire in my soul. It told me that this is where I was supposed to be. That feeling is the spirit that lives within all of the dancers here. Mr. Ailey created a beautiful space where we can come to cultivate, honor, respect and share this art-form. That feeling touches our audience members. Every performance is a prayer connecting my spirit to Mr. Ailey's spirit, and to all the other spirits of the dancers who have come and gone before. It's incredible."

What her typical work day looks like "We have company class at 10:30 am, and then we rehearse from 12 to 7 pm, Monday through Friday. It's very busy. We have so much rep to rehearse that the whole day is diverse and exciting. One hour could be rehearsal for a West African piece, the next hour could be something from Wayne McGregor and the next could be hip hop. It's a lot of hard work, but that's OK. Dance isn't just what the audience sees onstage—it's the sore bodies; it's the ice baths; it's the journey; it's the process. It's a lot to get used to when you start with the company, but if dancers are patient with themselves, they'll adjust." **DT**

Photo by Rissale O'Connor, courtesy of AAADT